

## [An American Spine]

Beliefs and Customs - Folk Stuff 18

FOLKLORE

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NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Herman Partnow

ADDRESS 557 West 144 Street

DATE May 10, 1939

SUBJECT UMEMPLOYED FRINGE

1. Date and time of interview

April 25, 1939

2. Place of interview

Madison Square Park

3. Name and address of informant

Anonymous

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4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.

5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

### FOLKLORE

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### NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Herman Partnow

ADDRESS 557 West 144 Street

DATE May 10, 1939

SUBJECT AN AMERICAN SPINE WITH A HEART IN THE OLD WORLD

Go hang yourself with your own necktie. When I'm fifty years, an old man, I'm strolling around with my hands in my pockets. I'm suddenly a vagabond. I'm telling you I got specks in front of my eyes. I ain't human no more.

After all, human nature is four things, ain't it? Clothing, food, shelter and recreation. In the morning you wake up, the first thing you put on your clothes, the second the belly starts to talk, so you gotta eat. The third thing you want recreation. So you get tired out, then you gotta lay down. But where is the bed? We ain't animals, they can sleep in a hole in

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the ground, nature gave them their own clothing. We ain't talking about insects neither — bedbugs and mosquitoes — their whole life is recreation.

What shall I do? I'm screaming in my sleep like my poppa, may he rest in peace. I ain't a tub of wisdom, I'm a plain old man, I got an American spine with a heart from the old world. Like they say around here, I ain't a thoroughbred. Suddenly it's a different world. Yesterday I'm sure 2 a thing is wrong, today somebody is doing it. So if somebody is doing it already, it can't be wrong? I'm completely turned around. I'm a not, a N-O-T. It's the world of the doughnut and the hot dog. Nothing balances. An old man was asking them for a blanket, I saw it with my own eyes, they sent him to the hospital. First they kill you, then they are putting a pillow under your head.

Look, my face. Such a face you don't get laying in the lap of lady luck. It's three years already - I come home three o'clock in the morning the kids are in bed but my wife she's dressed up to kill. Sarah, what's the matter I ask. She says: I'm going out. What out? I say. In the middle of the night, out? Go to bed, Sarah. She says: You go to bed, I'm going out. So a whole month I worried and complained and talked and finally she threw me out of the house altogether. What could I do? It was her property, I was depending on her. Twenty six years we was married, I was no more a man, you understand, not human, so she threw me out. The Bible tells you when Abraham was an old man the people they sent him in a young girl she should make him young again. But am I Abraham they should do this with me. Impossible! Go get born all over again!

A question: was I really born? Or maybe God dropped me through a hole in the sky and I ain't born yet. Dead I ain't neither. I'm like stuck in a sewer pipe. I'm in it, I'm stuffing it up and they're pushing me down in the river, the East River or the Hudson River, I got no choice.

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Back I can't go. It's too late. Like yesterday - I was standing on the breadline. Was it yesterday? What is it today? Tuesday? That's right, yesterday. I was standing there and suddenly a copy cop hollers: Back up. Two hundred people on the line, and he says to them back up. So he started in to shove, in two minutes there was a fight with three broken heads. You can't back up no more.

But one thing I'm finished with livin' and lyin', like they say here. The whole life it's like a cough, and when you're living it's like sucking cough drops - it don't help the poor people. And of course the rich people nothing helps no more - it's like a lot of pigs eating pigs' knuckles.

I wish only I was a woman, I wouldn't starve. I mean it.

The only thing it's a good God, a wise God, he won't let me live long. That's all.